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# The People's Game and the People's War: Football, Class and Nation in Wartime Britain, 1939–1945

Matthew Taylor\*

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**Abstract:** »Volkssport und Volkskrieg: Fußball, Klasse und Nation in Großbritannien während des Zweiten Weltkrieges«. The image of World War Two as a 'people's war,' during which a new sense of British national identity was forged, has initiated considerable scholarly inquiry in recent years. Some have argued for a remaking of Britishness during the war, seeing it as period when popular consciousness of the 'national' was enhanced and notions of communal and collective identities increasingly articulated. Others have outlined the limitations of the 'people's war' rhetoric, flagging up the tensions, divisions and social distinctions which continually threatened to destabilise the government's call to unity. This article breaks new ground in arguing that football became a key emblem both of the people and the nation in wartime Britain. Valued as a source of home front morale, and a means of keeping war workers fit and healthy, the game was also increasingly recognised as central to ordinary British life; part of the routine and rhythm of the everyday. However, as an emblem of the 'nation,' and competing ideas of what constituted it, the 'people's game' was also a site for expressions of disunity, division and dissatisfaction. Drawing on a mixture of official archives and private collections, as well as on representations in the popular press and on the radio, this article explores three main areas: the relationship between the wartime government and the game; the connections made between football and class identity; and the interaction between nation and region in the treatment and representation of football.

**Keywords:** Second World War, class, nation, Britishness, football, identity, morale.

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## 1. Introduction

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On 17 January 1942, Maurice Cranston, a young volunteer for the social research organisation Mass-Observation and a future philosopher, attended the England-Scotland football international at Wembley Stadium. In his account of the match, he made no mention of the play itself or the score (it ended 3-0 to England) but focused on the mood and behaviour of the crowd. 'When the game began,' he commented:

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I was surprised by the all round enthusiasm. I have been to other football matches but never have I seen Englishmen throw themselves into the game so much. They seemed determined to forget all else... At times it was almost hysterical. Whether they were cheering wildly or oh-ing with disappointment it really made no difference.

Significantly, he noted that on the way out of the stadium members of the crowd talked 'wistfully' of 'how nice it used to be before the war when [...] after tea on a Saturday they could sit down and listen to the football results and check their coupons.'<sup>1</sup> Here was a snapshot of football as a passion and a form of escape but also as representative of the ordinary, the everyday, of belonging and home; a sport woven into the cultural fabric of English, and possibly British, life.

Football was branded 'the people's game' by its first academic historian (Walvin 1975). The notion of 'the people' has been much debated in British social history since then. Patrick Joyce famously advocated its adoption as a more accurate and universalising alternative to 'class.' When social identity seemed, in practice, to be connected more to broader conceptions of 'the people' than the narrow language of class, Joyce argued, 'the value of applying the class label' became 'open to doubt' (Joyce 1991, 332). In both contemporary and academic usage, however, the terms have overlapped and football has been designated as a/the game of the 'people,' the 'masses,' the 'lower ranks,' or 'working class' or 'classes' interchangeably. In addition, football has enjoyed a parallel, often intertwining, existence as a 'national' sport, a cultural form popular and meaningful enough to be considered a vital ingredient of what has 'made' Britain and the British; though one which also could contradictorily emblemise and define the national identities of the English, Scottish, Welsh and Irish.

Scholars have been far from precise concerning when and where identities of 'nation' first coalesced around football. Most existing treatments of the game's cultural and social status in the mid-twentieth century have been inexplicit on the question and chronologically static. Ross McKibbin categorised football between 1918 and 1951 as a 'national sport,' that is, a sport 'broadly representative of society as a whole'; not as 'national' as cricket, perhaps, but 'the country's greatest sport,' by which he presumably meant the most popular (McKibbin 1998, 331, 339). In their study of post-war British sport, Richard Holt and Tony Mason saw the early 1950s as the turning point: the moment when professional football 'ceased to be the preserve of the working class and came to be recognised as the equal of cricket as part of *English* national culture' (Holt and Mason 2000, 97, my emphasis). This article challenges these views, and the fixed and unitary conception of identity that they promote. It does so by focusing on the Second World War, a time when identities of various kinds interacted with one another, and when the interplay between notions of nation and class were

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<sup>1</sup> Manuscript description of Scotland v England at Wembley (17 January 1942), Topic Collection (TC) 82/2/E, Mass-Observation Archive (M-O A), The Keep, Brighton.

particularly exposed. It demonstrates that far from signifying an interlude in the social and cultural history of the game, the war accelerated football's emergence as the recognised national sport of working-class Britain.

All writing on the Second World War has had to contend with the contemporary image of a 'people's war' during which a new sense of national identity was forged. The war, it has been argued, held 'a central place in the British national narrative,' creating and sustaining the notion of a united national community, and reinforcing 'ideas of Britishness defined against enemies both abroad and at home' (Ugolini and Pattinson 2015, 6). The result of this was, in the view of a leading historian of national identity, a remaking of Britishness during the 1940s, a period in which 'the idea of the nation [became] more closely synonymous with that of the people' (Weight 2002, 208). Without doubt, the Second World War was a period when the popular consciousness of the 'national' was enhanced and notions of its communal and collective dimensions were increasingly articulated and imagined. However, the intensified awareness of a nation united through war simultaneously prompted 'a thorough examination of what constituted British national identity' (Weight and Beach 1998, 8). For Sonya Rose, the centrality of national identity in people's lives produced 'the possibility for the kinds of conflicts that [...] came to be known as "identity politics."' The 'pull to unity,' she has argued, 'was accompanied by the pull to resist that incorporation in the name of particularity, difference or group distinctiveness' (Rose 2003, 7-8). Wartime national identity, in this view, was cross-cut by divisions based on gender, geography, race and social class. It was not one thing but many; a plural, not a unitary, phenomenon.

That wartime understandings of Britishness were neither monolithic nor necessarily coherent has been well established in a series of recent studies. Geoffrey Field has argued that the Second World War 'deepened' class identity and 'reshaped class relations' in 'important ways,' effectively nationalising workers by forging a new shared class consciousness and a common political agenda. Yet he also recognised that a popular working-class unity could co-exist with strong expressions of national identity and belonging, partly because the ambiguity of slogans such as the 'people's war' allowed for the existence of contradictions and a variety of contesting interpretations of what it meant to be British (Field 2011, 6, 377). Regional and sub-national identities could likewise flourish in the context of a pluralised and inclusive Britishness. Scottish and Welsh people lived with, and often thought through, the complexities of nationality, certainly more than the English, and this was no different in wartime. Welshness, it has been argued, was 'neither lost nor subsumed' during the wartime peak of Britishness; rather, despite closer contact with England and commitment to an overarching British cause, Welsh self-identity was sharpened by war, 'particularly amongst those for whom it was generally a rather unfocused and diffuse feeling' (Johnes 2015, 67-8).

British identity was at its most powerful, others have contended, when it was at its most generalised, when Britishness conjured up broad notions of 'sameness' and 'belonging' rather than sharply defined interpretations of what the nation stood for and what it meant. This was most clearly expressed in the ordinary routine and minutiae of life – 'in the daily lives of the people, in their shared experience and familiar surroundings.' The 'sameness' that defined British national identity was 'evoked in innumerable wartime celebrations of familiar British things,' as John Baxendale has argued, or in the everyday 'flagging' of the nation encapsulated in Michael Billig's concept of 'banal nationalism' (Baxendale 1999, 300; Billig 1995).

One of the most significant and ubiquitous cultural phenomena of the period, football has rarely been called into service by historians to test these assumptions. However, this article approaches the game as an important cultural space where understandings of national character and identity politics were debated. It breaks new ground in arguing that football became a key emblem both of the people and the nation in wartime Britain. The convergence of these two conceptions was important, as the values ascribed to football in wartime as a practical means of relaxation and rejuvenation and a symbol of normality, of everyday life, were one element which helped tie them together. Valued as a source of home front morale, and a means of keeping war workers fit and healthy, the game was increasingly seen as central to ordinary British life; part of the routine and rhythm of the everyday. However, as an emblem of the 'nation,' and ideas of what constituted it, the so-called 'people's game' was also a site for expressions of disunity, division and dissatisfaction; a location where concerns about social and economic inequalities were articulated. Football certainly came to symbolise the nation, as one of a number of commonplace cultures that linked the Britain of war and pre-war. Yet football's 'nation' was often exclusive and contained: industrial, male and working class. The game could and did stand for Britishness but the Britain it stood for was acknowledged as particular and distinct, some way from the unified nation of wartime mythology.

This article has four sections. The first of these contextualises the subsequent discussion by examining how the government and other politicians regarded the playing of football in wartime, and the relationships that developed between the state and the game's authorities over the course of the conflict. The second section shifts to consider popular attitudes to football, focusing particularly on how the game was inflected with specific class connotations by those who claimed to have little interest in it, such as respondents to the social organisation Mass-Observation's periodic directives. The third section centres on the perpetuation of regional and sub-national identities in wartime football, arguing that these did not necessarily conflict with the symbolic value of the game as representative of the British collectively. In the final part, football's potential as an outlet for the expression of pre-war memories and popular nostalgia are explored, with particular reference to the narratives of BBC radio and newspaper coverage.

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## 2. The Wartime Government and Football

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As in many arenas of political and cultural life, the British government's attitude to sport in general, and football in particular, was shaped by the experiences of the 1914-18 conflict. The reaction to the outbreak of war in August 1914 among governing bodies had been complicated, varying from sport to sport, but determined most of all by financial considerations. Most amateur bodies and clubs, in sports such as golf, hockey, lawn tennis and rugby union, had suspended fixtures and dedicated their resources and manpower to the war effort. Commercialised sports such as cricket, horse racing, football and rugby league, by contrast, generally opted to carry on (Veitch 1981; Taylor 2001; Collins 2006; John 2013). In common with entertainments like the theatre and music hall, they employed professional staff and were run as businesses, and so could not afford to stop unless compelled to do so. The government, for its part, advised and negotiated but did not force the football authorities to take a particular course of action. The War Office had originally left the decision of whether to continue playing or not at the discretion of the national Football Associations (FA). Within a few months, it was privately pressing the FAs to suspend cup competitions and international matches in order 'to satisfy public sentiment.'<sup>2</sup> They agreed to cancel internationals but maintained that they could help the war effort more 'by continuing the matches than by stopping them.'<sup>3</sup> Eventually the decision was made at the end of the 1914/15 season to suspend the normal league and cup competitions in England and Wales in favour of a regional programme of matches. But even then, government pressure had been a less significant factor than players joining the armed forces or taking up war work, the difficulties of travel restrictions and the financial strain on the professional clubs.<sup>4</sup>

The football authorities had less room for manoeuvre in 1939. The perceived risk of air attack led the government to close all places of entertainment and outdoor sports meetings when war was announced on 3 September. This was accepted without criticism by the game's authorities, as was the subsequent relaxation of the ban which allowed friendly matches and competitive fixtures to be played between 'local and district groups of clubs' and limited attendances according to area.<sup>5</sup> The details of these restrictions, and the way they were to be carried out, however, demonstrated the close relationships that were established between football's controlling bodies and government departments from the early stages of the war. Wider security policies were significantly shaped by negotiation. For instance, the differential treatment of estab-

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<sup>2</sup> The War and Football, Further Report of the FA Sub-Committee (7 December 1914), Football Association Archives (FAA), Wembley Stadium, London.

<sup>3</sup> The War and Football, FA Circular (5 December 1914), FAA.

<sup>4</sup> *Athletic News* (26 July 1915).

<sup>5</sup> Football in Time of War, FA Memo No. 3 (21 September 1939), FAA.

lishments in evacuation areas considered most vulnerable to air attack, on one hand, and the reception and neutral areas assumed to be safer, on the other, was in line with general policy. But the precise limitations placed on the size of crowds emerged as a result of consultation between the Home Office, the Ministry of Information, local police, and the associations and leagues. A low maximum of between 2,000 and 5,000 in evacuation areas, which government officials preferred, was pushed up in discussion with the FA, the Scottish FA and the Football League, which ran the elite professional game. FA secretary Stanley Rous argued that a higher limit of 8,000 would ‘just make the difference between games at a loss and games with their overheads paid.’<sup>6</sup> The Home Office’s plan to require advance ticket booking for all matches as a means of keeping crowds low was abandoned when clubs protested that it was unworkable, and police chiefs and Regional Information Officers, on the basis of the first wartime games, reported it to be unnecessary.<sup>7</sup> By October 1939, booking for matches at larger grounds with a capacity over 60,000, where a 15,000 maximum was imposed, was also relaxed, based on the infrequency of larger crowds under wartime conditions and to bring the whole country in line with cities like Glasgow, where the Chief Constable had already been given discretion to dispense with ticketing.<sup>8</sup>

Discussions over whether or not football should continue, and if so in what form, were wrapped up in broader debates concerning civilian morale. A central issue for historians of wartime Britain, studies of morale have nonetheless seriously underestimated the role of football, alongside other sports and entertainments, as a key part in the government’s strategy of ‘promoting well-being through recreation and leisure.’ Broadly speaking, it is true to say that the government recognised what Robert Mackay has called ‘the therapeutic value’ of playing, watching, reading and listening about, and betting on football ‘for a hard-worked, overstrained and war-weary civilian population’ (Mackay 2002, 209). If officials had been unsure how much the game mattered to some sections of the community, its initial prohibition and subsequent partial rehabilitation had probably brought this home. The local press generally welcomed the end of the Home Office ban. The *Leicester Mercury* considered the return of public football to be ‘a case of trusting the people’ and ensuring that their ‘spir-

<sup>6</sup> Football in Time of War, Football League Memo, undated [September 1939], Lancashire Archives (LA), Football League Collection (FLC), DDFOL/1/1/2/3; Sir Alexander Maxwell Memo (19 September 1939), The National Archives (TNA), London, HO 186/2082.

<sup>7</sup> Maxwell to Stanley Rous, draft letter, undated [September 1939]; F. S. James, Chief Constable of Sheffield, to Under-Secretary of State, Home Office (28 September 1939); John Hilton to Sir Wilfred Eady (26 September 1939), TNA, HO 186/2082.

<sup>8</sup> P. J. Sillitoe, City of Glasgow Police to W. Lewis, Scottish Home Office (25 September 1939); ARB to W. Lewis (28 September 1939); Circular letter to Chief Constables from F. C. Johnson (10 October 1939), TNA, HO 186/2082.

it' was sustained 'in its healthiest form.'<sup>9</sup> An editorial in the *Staffordshire Evening Sentinel* argued that along with cinemas and theatres, football was the key to maintaining 'the splendid morale, good spirits and confidence of the people.'<sup>10</sup> Mass-Observation took a similar view, but it was more critical than most newspaper editors of the initial ban and the game's subsequent organisation. A file report on 'War-Time Sport' from January 1940 contended that football's 'lack of connection [...] with officialdom' and the idea that it was primarily an entertainment 'to be sacrificed in an emergency' led to its temporary 'death' at the outbreak of war.<sup>11</sup> An earlier report had highlighted football's positive effect 'on the morale of the people,' and argued for first-class sportsmen to be regarded as equally 'important to the community' as watchmakers and curates, both reserved professions.<sup>12</sup> Observations of matches themselves in the early months of war drew mixed conclusions but the organisation itself tended to pick out those that highlighted the apathy and passivity of the crowd. It blamed the FA and the Home Office restrictions, in particular, for producing uncompetitive football and offering little to spark enthusiasm 'in the minds of the many people who found football a dynamic, energetic force and interest in their lives.'<sup>13</sup>

Mackay has shown that perceptions of morale were not fixed; they altered according to the progress of the war and the changing pressures this entailed (Mackay 2002, 45). While this was certainly true in relation to spectator sport in general, the role of football as relaxant and morale-lifter was rarely questioned. Angus Calder noted that 'almost no one had anything to say against soccer' during wartime, and this was particularly evident in the government and the House of Commons (Calder 1992, 374-5). Ministers needed little convincing that football had 'a beneficial effect on public morale,' even if they were less sure that some of its appendages, like pools gambling, should be encouraged.<sup>14</sup> This position was maintained throughout the crisis precipitated by the fall of France in June 1940 and the blitz from September 1940 to May 1941. Indeed, if anything the importance of football and other sports was reinforced as a result of a lengthy inter-departmental discussion in the summer of 1940 of the role to be played by the government in fighting 'boredom and loss of morale' among the civilian population and the troops during the approaching winter. For Major Boyle of the Air Ministry, it was crucial that the government should encourage 'the reintroduction of normal life [...] the life by which the average man-in-the-street lives and moves and has his being' – including football and others sports 'in reasonable quantities' – as soon as possible.<sup>15</sup> Sir

<sup>9</sup> *Leicester Mercury* (9 September 1939).

<sup>10</sup> *Staffordshire Evening Sentinel* (11 September 1939).

<sup>11</sup> War-Time Sport: A Structural Analysis, File Report (FR) 18 (14 January 1940), 1-2, M-O A.

<sup>12</sup> Sport, FR 13 (13 December 1939), 6, M-O A.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 12-13, 6.

<sup>14</sup> John Hilton to Sir Wilfred Eady (23 September 1939), TNA, HO 186/2082.

<sup>15</sup> Major Boyle to Miss S. Griffith (31 July 1940), TNA, INF 1/260.



Kenneth Clark, Director of the National Gallery, advised that it was crucial for the government to make sure ‘decent people’ did not feel ashamed of ‘taking advantage of whatever entertainments are offered.’ He was concerned that the closing down of entertainment and sport at the beginning of the war had encouraged this feeling, and that the government should officially announce that it was their policy ‘to let people enjoy themselves as far as possible.’<sup>16</sup>

Spectator sport faced its greatest challenge in February and March 1942, when in the context of a press campaign headed by the *Daily Express* against sporting events and those who wasted precious time and resources attending them, Lord President and Leader of the House Stafford Cripps proclaimed some sports to be ‘completely out of accord with the true determination of the people.’<sup>17</sup> Significantly, however, his target was not football but greyhound racing and boxing. Indeed throughout the war football was particularly favoured in official circles. It was rarely subjected to the degree of criticism frequently levelled at the other two major spectator sports at the time, dog racing and horse racing.<sup>18</sup> In defending it against increases in entertainment tax, wartime advocates at Westminster emphasised football’s status as a ‘national’ game but one which was clearly ascribed to particular social groups. For West Bromwich MP John Dugden, football played a considerable role, alongside cricket, ‘in our national life’: the fact that people could go to games ‘to relax when they come out of factories’ helped to ‘keep up the nation’s morale.’ Middlesbrough East MP A. Edwards, considered football ‘a great national game which most industrial centres in the country at any rate greatly appreciate,’ and one which should therefore be protected and preserved by the government.<sup>19</sup> Similar sentiments were expressed in another debate over entertainment tax shortly after the war had ended. MPs argued that in increasing entertainment duty on football and other sports ‘we are penalising the recreation of the ordinary working man’ and attacking ‘one of the necessities of the people.’ Lieut.-Commander Braithwaite saw the game as an unequivocal force of social unity: ‘a cement which enables us to be a nation in times of stress.’<sup>20</sup>

As the war progressed, the government’s relations with the football authorities were channelled through three main issues: the organisation of competition; safety restrictions; and travel restrictions. The move from nationally-structured to regional competition was the most controversial element of elite football’s revised wartime schedule. In England and Wales, the Football League separated its clubs in October 1939 into eight regional groupings of

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<sup>16</sup> Minute, Sir Kenneth Clark to the Minister (22 August 1940), TNA, INF 1/260.

<sup>17</sup> House of Commons Debates (HC Deb) (25 February 1942), vol 378, cc314.

<sup>18</sup> On greyhound racing and horse racing, see TNA, HO 186/739, HO 186/740, HO 186/2080 and HO 186/2081.

<sup>19</sup> HC Deb (2 June 1943), vol 390, cc229–43.

<sup>20</sup> HC Deb (29 November 1945), vol 416, cc1550–79.

between eight and twelve.<sup>21</sup> The Scottish Football League organised a western and eastern division. Neither arrangement proved successful. Interest in matches which often pitted unequal teams against one another proved limited and gates were poor.<sup>22</sup> The secretary of the Scottish FA successfully appealed to the Home Office to be permitted to organise an Emergency Cup Competition on a national basis in 1940 as some of its clubs ‘were in grave danger of having to close down entirely.’<sup>23</sup> Yet while they were widely considered to have been a ‘failure’ by the clubs, regionalised competitions remained in one form or another throughout the conflict.<sup>24</sup> The Football League was split into a large northern and a much smaller southern section, with the former sub-divided into lesser areas (Midlands, Lancashire, Yorkshire and North East). A small western section (incorporating clubs from Bath, Bristol and south Wales) was also introduced for the 1942/43 season. In Scotland, a Southern League and, from 1941/42, a North-Eastern League, operated for the rest of the war (Inglis 1988, 167; Crampsey 1990, 105-28). Each season, the football associations and leagues presented their proposals for Home Office approval, framed with broader wartime limitations in mind. Thus for 1942/43, by which time transport difficulties were becoming acute, the Football League based its proposals ‘on the principle of the maximum entertainment with the minimum travel,’ and the Scottish FA summarised the journeys of the participant teams and committed itself to further limiting travel ‘if the Ministry so desire.’<sup>25</sup>

The safety of crowds at football matches remained a central consideration throughout the war. Initial attendance restrictions were set cautiously on the basis, as we have seen, of the likelihood of air attack, factored together with ground capacity. The Home Office also maintained a detailed record of air raid shelter facilities on football grounds and close by, as well as monitoring attendance to ensure that it kept within the prescribed limits.<sup>26</sup> But here too, the government was open to negotiation and modified its policy if it could be convinced of the rationale for so doing. One instance in which this did occur was over the procedure when an air raid siren was heard during play. In the summer of 1940, the government opted to encourage work to continue after the alert

<sup>21</sup> Minutes of Football League Management Committee (2 October 1939), LA, FLC, DDFOL/1/1/2/3.

<sup>22</sup> See typescript description of football match (Arsenal v Crystal Palace at White Hart Lane) (4 November 1939); Typescript interview with Mr Ted Vizard (16 November 1939), M-O A, TC, 82/2/E.

<sup>23</sup> George Graham to Sir Wilfred Eady (15 January 1940), TNA, HO 186/2082.

<sup>24</sup> Report of Special General Meeting of Members of the Football League (1 March 1940); Minutes of Ordinary General Meeting of Shareholders of the Football League (29 July 1940), LA, FLC, DDFOL/1/1/2/3.

<sup>25</sup> Football League, Notes for Meeting, undated [May 1942]; Scottish FA, Memo for meeting at Home Office, 8 May 1942, TNA, HO 186/2082.

<sup>26</sup> Table on Limitation of Spectators, undated [April 1940]; Table of London Grounds and Facilities, undated [1940], TNA, HO 186/2082.

had been sounded, so as not to affect war production. This practice soon became common in other leisure activities but it was initially not permitted at sports events. The FA lobbied vigorously to be 'placed on the same footing as theatres, cinemas and other entertainments' and complained that clubs in London, especially, where Saturday air raids were frequent, faced 'a financial crisis.'<sup>27</sup> The government eventually relented and allowed play to continue after the alert, providing cover for the crowd on the ground was sufficient and a roof spotter was in place.<sup>28</sup> More generally, associations were normally successful in negotiating higher attendance limits for international matches or representative games, and for some local club derbies. Discretion was also applied to Chief Constables to set their own limits, especially in Scotland where the threat of bombing was considerably lower than in England.<sup>29</sup> The government did agree in September 1943 to increase the attendance limit to 40,000 in all areas except the southern and eastern coastal regions of England, reflecting the reduced risk of air attack. But significantly, this policy change was not advertised to the public, for fear that publicity might encourage the higher attendances that other government departments such as the Ministry of War Transport (MoWT) were still determined to avoid.<sup>30</sup>

By late 1941, transport had replaced safety as the main rationale for continued constraints on crowd sizes and competition structures. It was the MoWT which stood in the way of an FA proposal to allow a crowd limit of half the ground capacity in all parts of Britain in the summer of 1941. Ministry of Home Security (MoHS) officials were not convinced by the transport authorities' concern that attendances would rise if 'the atmosphere of discouragement is removed,' but decided that there was ultimately 'little point in making any change.'<sup>31</sup> The MoWT expressed little sympathy, too, when the Football League complained in December 1941 that travel restrictions were 'jeopardising the whole competition.' As many long distance trains had been withdrawn, the League requested that its clubs should be permitted greater freedom to travel by road. But R. H. Hill of the MoWT considered such exceptional measures not justified, reminded the League's representatives that drivers and buses were in short supply and asked that they consider the effect on attitudes

<sup>27</sup> Memo from Stanley Rous and the FA (15 November 1940), TNA, HO 186/2082.

<sup>28</sup> Home Security Circular No. 288/1940, Open-Air Entertainments: Air Raid Warnings (5 December 1940), TNA, HO 186/2082.

<sup>29</sup> J.F.C. Carter Memo (5 December 1939); Metropolitan Police Memo (21 January 1940), TNA, MEPO 2/3488; W. Lewis to J.D.V. Hodge, 22 July 1941, TNA, HO 186/2082. See also TNA, MEPO 2/7775, Wembley Football Cup Finals, 1941-1946.

<sup>30</sup> War Cabinet, Civil Defence Committee, Note by the Home Secretary and Minister of Home Security (9 September 1943); A.W. Peterson Minute (3 November 1943); Minute (12 November 1943), TNA, HO 186/2082.

<sup>31</sup> Ministry of War Transport to A. J. Lenfestey (11 September 1941); Minute (12 September 1941), TNA, HO 186/2082.

in the USA, where petrol had been rationed to send to the UK, if it became known that this ‘was being used to convey football teams.’ In response to the League’s concerns that clubs in the north-east of England had to travel to play matches in Leeds, Huddersfield, Bradford and York in order to carry on, Hill opined that it was probably ‘necessary for isolated teams to cease playing for the duration.’<sup>32</sup> Amateur clubs were allowed to travel distances by road of 25 miles, but complaints such as those in February 1942 that ‘lack of conveyance’ made it difficult to transport teams and so to keep football ‘alive’ in the Lancashire villages, were frequently reported in the local press.<sup>33</sup>

The transport authorities had to strike a balance between supporting football as ‘a desirable form of recreation’ and protecting war production.<sup>34</sup> It also needed to factor in the sensibilities of those with little interest in the game. Home Intelligence reports showed that the transport problems of war workers were a consistent cause of public complaint.<sup>35</sup> The MoWT frequently asserted its policy that no additional rail or road facilities should be made available for football matches. But in practice it was often necessary to put on additional trains so that war work and freight traffic were not unduly affected. Hence an extra twelve trains were utilised to carry an expected 10,000 spectators from Portsmouth to Wembley for the 1942 London Cup final.<sup>36</sup>

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### 3. Which People’s Game?

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By the beginning of the Second World War, football was the most popular game in Britain on almost any quantifiable measure. But it was not considered a sport for all. It remained, as Andrew August has commented, ‘the quintessential working-class sport, for boys and young men as players, for younger and older men as spectators, and for all who participated in the pools.’ Unlike cricket, which despite entrenched class differences, had developed a powerful image as a ‘national’ sport, with an ability to appeal ‘across class lines,’ those who followed and watched football in the 1930s remained ‘overwhelmingly working class’ (August 2007, 216-7). The football grounds of England, Nicholas Fishwick concluded in his study of the social history of the game before 1950, were akin to ‘the Labour Party at prayer’ (Fishwick 1989, 150).

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<sup>32</sup> Minutes of Football League Management Committee, Report of Interview with Ministry of War Transport (3 December 1941), FAA.

<sup>33</sup> *Motherwell Times*, 13 February 1942.

<sup>34</sup> Minutes of Football League Management Committee, Report of Interview with Ministry of War Transport (3 December 1941), FAA.

<sup>35</sup> War Cabinet, State of Home Morale during the period ending 27 April 1942, Ministry of Information Draft, undated [April 1942], TNA, INF 1/284.

<sup>36</sup> Extract from Minutes of Railway Executive Committee (12 May 1942); CR Min, 563, Train Services for Sporting Events other than Race Meetings (12 May 1942), TNA, AN 2/866.

This section explores popular attitudes to football in wartime by looking at how the game was represented by Mass-Observation, in terms of its observers and its volunteer panel. Mass-Observation was founded in 1937 by Tom Harrisson, Charles Madge and Humphrey Jennings. It was, as Penny Summerfield has observed, both a social survey organisation and a social movement, dedicated to documenting elements of everyday life and culture normally ignored or taken for granted as well as charting the changing popular moods of the people (Summerfield 1985). It sought to supply ‘an anthropology and a mass-documentation for a vast sector of normal life’ not adequately reflected by the media, the arts, political leaders, and others (Harrisson 1976, 11). To do this, it recruited a ‘National Panel’ of observers who were asked to respond in writing to periodic ‘directives’; many also kept written diaries. This worked alongside the ethnographic methodology employed as part of the ‘Worktown’ strand of the organisation, whereby the people of Bolton were ‘observed’ in their everyday lives, shopping, visiting the pub, dancing and socialising, going on holiday, watching sport, and so on. The war ‘diverted’ Mass-Observation’s work but it maintained its nationwide panel and teams of trained observers to supply material on a semi-independent basis to government bodies, particularly the Ministry of Information (Harrisson 1976, 12; Hinton 2013).

Mass-Observation approached football as one element of its more general concern with the leisure pursuits of ordinary people. Football featured prominently as part of its investigation of war’s impact on sport during the first six months of the conflict. Observers visited a handful of matches, spoke to club officials and reported conversations with, and overhead conversations between, spectators and followers of the game. In April 1940, and again in March and April 1941, Mass-Observation also interviewed members of the public on their attitude to their favourite sports and sports news. A year later, in reaction to Cripps’ criticisms of some sports in the House of Commons, a question on the topic was included as a directive to the national panel.<sup>37</sup> Some of this material was written up and incorporated into file reports or published in other forms. But the bulk of it has been surprisingly underutilised both by historians of the home front and experts on British leisure and sport.

Much of this writing positioned football very precisely in terms of social class and status vis-à-vis other sports and forms of entertainment. We have little detailed evidence of how the composition of the football crowd changed during wartime. A description of an Arsenal-Crystal Palace match from November 1939 noted that the majority of those present were connoisseurs of the game and dedicated fans of the home team but made only one explicit reference to class when it quoted the comments of ‘a working class man.’<sup>38</sup> Similar-

<sup>37</sup> M-O Bulletin for March 1942, FR 1126, undated [March 1942], M-O A.

<sup>38</sup> Typescript description of football match (Arsenal v Crystal Palace at White Hart Lane) (4 November 1939), TC, 82/2/E, M-O A.

ly, an amateur game at Golder's Green from the same period was apparently populated by 'experts' and 'die-hards,' almost all of whom were male and many of whom the observer categorised as belonging to Mass-Observation's 'C' grouping, meaning artisans and skilled workers.<sup>39</sup> Even in the 'expensive seats,' from which Cranston watched the 1942 England-Scotland fixture, 'the obviously more prosperous working people' were included among the mixed group described.<sup>40</sup> Similar accounts of greyhound meetings, by comparison, made more explicit reference to social class. At Wembley in May 1940 there were 'working class everywhere' and over three-quarters of the crowd counted at the Walthamstow, New Cross and White City greyhound stadiums in London in February 1942 were 'working-class people.'<sup>41</sup> In his personal response to Cripps' speech, Harrison argued that the public attacks 'from MPs and others in the high income levels' on greyhound racing and boxing were explained by the 'predominantly working-class appeal' of these sports, 'an appeal especially to male physical workers with limited leisure opportunities.' Football, by contrast, which Harrison noted had recently been given 'the powerful sanction' of the attendance of the Prime Minister Winston Churchill, was left comparatively untouched. The implication was that, though recognised as a working-class sport, football had a higher cultural status as the chosen sport of 'productive' industrial workers and not the 'slackers,' 'dodgers' and 'parasites' sometimes erroneously associated with the dog track.<sup>42</sup>

The responses to the March 1942 directive tended to locate football, in a similar way, as the working-class sport most accepted by other social groups. Panel-lists were asked their views on whether 'big sporting events' should continue in wartime. In its summary of the findings, Mass-Observation identified football as receiving the highest 'approval' rating – that is, the sport that respondents mentioned specifically should continue. It was also a long way behind the other popular spectator sports, horse racing and greyhound racing, in terms of disapproval. 'Many people feel,' it was concluded, 'that football should continue,' as 'a means of relaxation for thousands.' Even those who wanted sporting events to be restricted further, it was noted, tended to think differently about professional football, due to this assumed role as 'a vital mass-relaxation.'<sup>43</sup>

<sup>39</sup> Typescript description of match (Golders Green v Enfield); Interview with the Golder's Green secretary (11 November 1939), TC, 82/2/E, M-O A.

<sup>40</sup> Manuscript description of Scotland v England at Wembley (17 January 1942), TC, 82/2/E, M-O A.

<sup>41</sup> A Greyhound Meeting at Wembley Stadium on a Saturday Afternoon during the 9th Month of the War (May 1940), TC, 86/1/D, M-O A; Some Thoughts on Greyhounds and National Unity, FR 1149 (10 March 1942), M-O A, 7.

<sup>42</sup> Some Thoughts on Greyhounds and National Unity, FR 1149 (10 March 1942), M-O A, 4, 6, summary.

<sup>43</sup> Report on Attitudes to the Continuance of Organised Sport in Wartime, FR 1229, M-O A, 2, 3, 7.

If we delve further into the individual responses, we can see more clearly the interplay between class, cultural distinction and the nation in the way in which football was discussed. Mass-Observation's national panel was far from representative of British society more generally. Only a small percentage (around 19 per cent in 1939) identified themselves as working class, at a time when the manual working class made up around three-quarters of the population (Hinton 2008, 210-1). The majority saw themselves as occupying a position somewhere in the middle classes. Geographically, there was a bias towards the south of England and many panellists identified with the political left. Mike Savage has argued that rather than reading the panel as 'some kind of representative sample,' historians ought to recognise its distinctiveness as an intellectual, literate and relatively affluent group; or a 'cultural movement of the educated middle class' (Savage 2008, 459). They have also been seen as writers with a 'heightened social awareness' and 'a perception of their separateness from other parts of society' (Courage 2007). For Savage, one of the most distinctive features of the writing of respondents was their attempt to distance themselves both from the working class and 'the staid, non-intellectual members of the middle class.' The working class, he suggests, are often referred to but rarely discussed with any detail or with particular knowledge or interest. They appear in this writing as a 'default' class, a group whose cultural traits and activities 'need no specific elucidation,' existing outside the cultural world of the Mass Observer (Savage 2008, 457, 463, 466).

The treatment of football in the 1942 directive replies tallies in many respects with Savage's more general observations. Many respondents certainly did offer their approval, though often partial and qualified, for the continuation of football in wartime. In doing so, however, they often staked out their cultural distance and intellectual difference from those they considered the game was *really* for. Even the relatively small proportion of Mass Observers who admitted to having been football fans in the past were normally quick to point out that they were no longer able, but more importantly that they did not now need, to attend games. One respondent who had attended matches about once a month pre-war admitted that he now had far less time, and worked Saturday afternoons, in addition 'to the natural feeling of its comparative unimportance.'<sup>44</sup> Those who had the time to watch football still often chose a different pastime in the context of war. A female observer confessed to having replaced her weekly football with the cinema, as a more appropriate means of 'rest' and recuperation.<sup>45</sup> 'Instead of watching Hartlepoons United,' another respondent commented, 'I am now secretary of a Church League Club.'<sup>46</sup>

<sup>44</sup> Directive Respondent (DR) 2804, March 1942 Directive, M-O A.

<sup>45</sup> DR 2252, March 1942 Directive.

<sup>46</sup> DR 2656, March 1942 Directive.

Invariably when mention was made of football's value as relaxation and escapism, it was in relation to the working class rather than the Observer's own social group. For this class of people, it was not just an enjoyable diversion but a vital means of recuperation, some respondents maintained. A London-based male considered football 'a fairly "necessary" sport'; another suggested that there were large sections of the population for whom 'such things are almost the breath of life.'<sup>47</sup> Many pointed out the limited recreational outlets for male industrial workers. 'Although this is not my idea of relaxation,' one female Observer noted, 'it is unfair to expect these people to change their methods of enjoying themselves when they are doing war work.'<sup>48</sup> Favourable comparisons were often made with alternative forms of amusement. A male respondent, for instance, claimed that the 'workers of this country' were 'much more interested in soccer and boxing than in crooners.'<sup>49</sup> But it was the comparison with horse racing and greyhound racing which recurred most often in the panellists' replies.<sup>50</sup> As an entertainment synonymous with the skilled worker who formed the backbone of the nation's war effort, football's symbolic and functional roles were regularly applauded. While the working population would 'feel the loss' of a football match very much, one respondent claimed, horse racing by comparison could easily be dispensed with, as it was allegedly patronised by 'people who have nothing to do, and plenty of money to do it with.'<sup>51</sup> Those who gave football their approval thus did so both positively and negatively; identifying it as a vital form of recreation for the productive working classes who needed it, and as a more tolerable symbol of the working nation at play than the morally dubious gambling sports of the unskilled worker and the idle rich.

Not all respondents, however, saw football as a distant component of 'separate, mostly self-enclosed' working-class lives (Field 2013, 236). A number expressed the view that wartime circumstances, especially the importance of war production, meant that the provision of class-based recreations were now national concerns. Working-class culture had effectively become nationalised. One male respondent focused on the 'national' importance of games like football in maintaining the confidence of the people. 'If "morale" is to be kept up,' he commented, 'surely the nation should be allowed to enjoy the sporting events it has hitherto taken for granted.'<sup>52</sup> Others talked of major sporting events as national 'traditions,' locating them among the many familiar markers of Britishness, as one of the 'things we are fighting for.'<sup>53</sup> Nor did some respondents regard it as contradictory to claim football for both the working class

<sup>47</sup> DRs 3081, 3061, March 1942 Directive.

<sup>48</sup> DR 3027, March 1942 Directive.

<sup>49</sup> DR 1264, March 1942 Directive.

<sup>50</sup> See DRs 1325, 2156, 2315, 1313, 2970, March 1942 Directive.

<sup>51</sup> DR 2751, March 1942 Directive.

<sup>52</sup> DR 2941, March 1942 Directive.

<sup>53</sup> DR 3073, March 1942 Directive.



and the nation. As well as advocating ‘the Cup Final’ alongside the Derby and Wimbledon as a key signifier of *English* nationhood, one Observer stressed the importance of sports like football as an ‘invaluable’ safety valve for a nation at war. ‘[W]hat does a hard working factory hand more good than seeing a hearty game of football,’ he asked rhetorically: ‘It’s something in the crowd and the smell – something called life.’<sup>54</sup>

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#### 4. Region and Nation

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Historians have only just begun to think seriously about the complex geographies of the British wartime ‘nation.’ For good reason, a great deal of attention has been paid to the divide between the city and countryside, and the competing claims of both to represent Britain. Lucy Noakes, for instance, has demonstrated that for the very same group whose feelings about football we have just considered, Mass-Observation’s volunteer panel, the ‘nation’ to which they attached themselves emotionally was a specific one, defined more than anything else in terms of the rural landscape of the south of England (Noakes 2015). In this section, we are less interested in the city-countryside dichotomy than the way in which the relationship between ideas of region and nation on one hand, and the tensions between Britain’s four distinctive national cultures on the other, were played out in the context of wartime football. The argument here is that far from being painted over in a unifying national coat, regional and sub-national structures and loyalties remained important and indeed were increasingly highlighted in the wartime game. The emphasis on local, regional and distinct national footballing identities did not mean, however, that the Britishness of football (an identification insufficiently acknowledged by historians of the game) was necessarily rejected (Taylor 2008, 11-3). As in other arenas of political and cultural life, regionalism in football was energised by the desire to be recognised as an essential part of the nation.

Wartime football accentuated many of the regional tensions which had long affected the organisation of the game. Dave Russell has noted that ‘arguments within sports were inevitably overlain with a powerful spatial dimension’ and this was particularly true of football (Russell 2004, 251). The London-based FA had been a target for criticism outside the capital for many years, especially in the north of England, where the professional game developed first and from where the majority of pre-war league champions and cup winners had come. Perceptions of favouritism to southern players and clubs, and the privileged status of Wembley as the home of the FA Cup final and of England-Scotland internationals, both particularly piqued the northern football world. The FA’s

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<sup>54</sup> DR 2829, March 1942 Directive.

main rival for control of the elite game was the Football League, an 88-club nationwide professional competition at the beginning of the war, with its headquarters in Preston in Lancashire. The tensions between the two bodies, bubbling gently throughout the interwar years, were not primarily about geography, though it is certainly evident that the Football League saw itself as a 'provincial counterweight [...] to metropolitan ambition' (Russell 2004, 250). If anything, the war helped to improve cooperation between the two, although they maintained distinct spheres of responsibility. In 1945, some of the League's southern-based clubs pushed to have its offices moved from Lancashire to London so that it could be kept 'in closer touch with important government departments' but the predominantly northern and midlands-based lawyers and small businessmen on the Management Committee stymied the proposal (Inglis 1988, 170).

The main wartime conflicts in the elite game emerged from the new competitive structures based on regional divisions. The creation in 1941 of Scotland's North-Eastern League (NEL), consisting of clubs from Aberdeen, Fife and Edinburgh previously denied organised football, had generated considerable resentment from the larger, established Scottish Southern League (SSL). When Rangers agreed to play its second team in the new competition, the SSL retaliated by threatening to ban the Glasgow club's players from competing in two competitions. The new league's representatives challenged the 'utter selfishness' of the SSL motion, while the *Daily Record* described it as a 'stupid decision' by the clubs in the south, who had done 'a lot of damage to their country cousins' by disbanding the Scottish Football League in the first place.<sup>55</sup> Backed by the Scottish FA, the NEL pressed on and the SSL backed down.<sup>56</sup> But conflict erupted again the following spring when the SSL voted to exclude the NEL clubs from its successful Summer Cup competition, supposedly on the grounds of travel difficulties and the fact that the weaker NEL clubs would fail to attract large gates. They also clearly resented Rangers being given a second 'bite at the cherry' with its two teams (Crampsey 1991, 120), a fact the NEL recognised when it refused to 'accept as sincere the reason given' for excluding the northern clubs and bemoaned the 'unsportsmanlike and unfriendly attitude' of the southerners.<sup>57</sup>

The main fracture in English football's administrative structure involved London's professional clubs. Conscious of the precedent set during the First World War, when they had run a competition independent of Football League control, the London clubs, led by Tottenham Hotspur, had in July 1940 attempted unsuccessfully to wrest administrative control over the regional sec-

<sup>55</sup> *Dundee Courier* (4 June 1941); *Daily Record* (4 June 1941).

<sup>56</sup> *Dundee Courier* (12 June 1941).

<sup>57</sup> Minutes of Scottish FA Council (25 May 1942), Scottish Football Museum (SFM), Hampden Park, Glasgow, ACC9017/39.

tions from the Football League Management Committee (FLMC).<sup>58</sup> Disagreements continued into the following spring, when the London clubs organised their own cup competition in spite of the opposition of the FLMC.<sup>59</sup> When the FLMC plans for its regional groupings for 1941/42 were announced in June, the London representatives complained that too much travelling would be involved, and voted to break away from the Football League and form their own London War League.<sup>60</sup> Significantly, they stressed the fit between their plans and the national war effort. Long-distance games, it was argued would involve players 'absenting themselves from work of national importance' and the London clubs 'refuse[d] to be identified with such unpatriotic behaviour.' Supporters of the London group claimed that its league involved 3,000 miles of travel, compared with 9,000 miles under the Football League scheme.<sup>61</sup> The FLMC reacted by cancelling the League membership of the capital's eleven rebel clubs and of four associates in the south. They were soon joined by Portsmouth, who were forced to sign up to the rebel competition to save their fixtures.<sup>62</sup> The London clubs held out until December 1941, when the FLMC agreed to a compromise whereby League membership would be restored in return for nominal fines and what Simon Inglis (1988, 167) termed 'an agreed statement of regret.'<sup>63</sup> But the rebels' point had been reluctantly accepted by the Football League, their London-based league plan remaining in place, with the addition of just two clubs, for the rest of the war.

The interplay between local and national was an important element of football's popular appeal. The regional wartime game, however, offered no national stage upon which teams could project a sense of civic pride and belonging. It offered up more local confrontations, but these were shorn of the wider competitive context in which victory was noticed by newspapers beyond the locality and the region. It also often denied supporters the opportunity of confronting, and sometimes humiliating, an unpopular (and invariably successful) 'other' from a different region: one of the Glasgow 'Old Firm' in the east or north of Scotland or 'lucky' Arsenal in the north of England. The use of guest players, a necessary measure given the frequent mobility of service personnel and war workers, was a particularly controversial feature. Some clubs made extensive use of 'guests': Notts County reportedly faced a Sheffield United team with no less than ten in March 1943.<sup>64</sup> And the letters contained in Walsall FC's Players' Registration Book demonstrate the importance of guests at a

<sup>58</sup> Minutes of the Ordinary General Meeting of the Shareholders of the Football League (29 July 1940), LA, FLC, DDFOL/1/1/2/3.

<sup>59</sup> *Nottingham Evening Post* (9 June 1941).

<sup>60</sup> *Daily Herald* (23 July 1941).

<sup>61</sup> *Daily Herald* (28 July 1941); *Portsmouth Evening News* (8 August 1941).

<sup>62</sup> *Western Daily Press* (6 August 1941); *Portsmouth Evening News* (11 August 1941).

<sup>63</sup> *Daily Herald* (28 November 1941); *Dundee Courier* (12 December 1941).

<sup>64</sup> *Nottingham Evening Post* (20 March 1943).

time when the availability of players was so unpredictable.<sup>65</sup> For some, the difficulties of maintaining interest in teams that were less rooted or connected to the locality than in peacetime summed up the inadequacies of wartime football. One Mass-Observation interviewee described regional football in November 1939 as ‘a mess. There is no league. Nothing we are used to.’<sup>66</sup> A subsequent report felt that the ‘free borrowing’ of players had ‘annoyed real supporters’ and ‘killed much of the incentive to go and see “my team.”’<sup>67</sup>

The tension between regional and national dimensions of football was reflected in the way in which the game was represented by radio broadcasting. Historians of the BBC have noted that the suspension of the separate regional networks for the duration of the war did not signal the end of regional programming. According to Thomas Hajkowski, the continuation of ‘regionally flavored programs’ [sic.] allowed the BBC to recognise ‘the national diversity of Britain’ within the context of an emphasis on national unity (Hajkowski 2010, 121). This was certainly evident in the broadcasting of football, which played a small but not insignificant part in the wartime BBC becoming more generally ‘responsive to listeners’ tastes’ (Nicholas 1999, 63). The BBC intended its football broadcasts to be spread ‘as widely as is practicable’ over the different regions covered by the new wartime competitions. This was achieved partly by ensuring that each of the main regions was represented in the match commentaries that were broadcast as part of the Forces Programme and in other programming.<sup>68</sup> In the schedule for October and November 1940, for instance, three games from the North Region were featured, with two from London and one each from Wales and the Midlands. The fifteen match January-May 1945 schedule included six from the North, four from London, two each from the Midlands and Scotland and one from Wales.<sup>69</sup> The disproportionate focus on the north was considered by programme planners as an accurate reflection of the cultural importance of football in that region. Northern representatives reminded Head Office in January 1940 that ‘the North’ had more senior football clubs than the other English and Welsh regions put together and that ‘a great many’ professionals playing for non-northern clubs ‘were bred in the mining districts of the North and exported later.’ For this reason, it hoped that the ‘angle’ of any future broadcasting would not be ‘unduly metropolitan.’<sup>70</sup> There were some accusations of southern bias, such as the fact that the results

<sup>65</sup> Walsall FC Players’ Registration Book, including wartime letters, Walsall Record Office, 522/1/16.

<sup>66</sup> Informal interview (M.20.C) (7 November 1939), M-O-A, 82/2/E.

<sup>67</sup> Typescript description, Football and the war (19 November 1939), 2.

<sup>68</sup> Director of Outside Broadcasting to S. F. Rous (26 September 1939), BBC Written Archives Centre (WAC), R30/916/1, Caversham Park, Reading.

<sup>69</sup> Provisional Football Schedule, to end of November 1940 (4 October 1940); Football Schedule (12 May 1945), BBC WAC, R30/915/1.

<sup>70</sup> Roger Wilson to DT (15 January 1940), BBC WAC, R51/565/2.

of southern fixtures were read out in sports bulletins before those of the north.<sup>71</sup> However, the BBC's emphasis on major representative matches with a potential national and international audience – full internationals, inter-service clashes, and other games which normally included players from a range of regions and clubs across the UK – was an astute way of ensuring that regional attachments could be flagged up alongside national loyalties.<sup>72</sup>

As in the case of regional identification, football provided a platform upon which the particularities of the UK's four nations could be conveyed in combination with expressions of national unity. Scotland offers perhaps the best example, and is the case we will focus on briefly here. With separate administrative structures and a particular cultural attachment to the game which had no genuine rival among its British neighbours, the leaders of Scottish football had a legitimate claim to be treated independently by the wartime government. This was certainly a concern for English administrators such as Rous, who urged the Home Office as early as September 1939 not to allow Scottish exceptions to British rules.<sup>73</sup> The government resisted the Scottish FA's lobbying to have higher maximum attendances in its evacuation areas, especially Glasgow, although greater ad hoc maxima were, as we have seen, accepted more readily by local Chief Constables in Scotland than in England. Distanced from the worst of wartime bombing, Scottish football followers had always been less accepting of the attendance and travel restrictions: George Graham, the secretary of the Scottish FA, admitted in 1942 that government measures were 'not popular in Scotland.'<sup>74</sup> One issue which the Scottish football authorities pressed consistently throughout the war was the loosening of restrictions on mid-week matches. In August 1942, the Scottish FA, under pressure from its semi-professional junior clubs, persuaded the Home Office to allow 'as a working rule' midweek matches with attendances below 2,000 in Scotland specifically.<sup>75</sup> Attempts to get the ban lifted for senior clubs were rejected by the government on a number of occasions, however.<sup>76</sup> In its 1942/43 annual report, the Scottish FA criticised the restrictions openly, noting that the transport, equipment and manpower difficulties of continuing to play had increased during the course of the war and hoping that 'greater consideration will be shown' by the government in future 'towards [the clubs] in their efforts to carry on good, clean, sport.'<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> Michael Standing to AC(N) (25 March 1945); BBC WAC, R28/256/1; Raymond Glendenning to E(ONB) (27 February 1945), R30/915/1.

<sup>72</sup> Standing to GOSD (5 December 1944), BBC WAC, R30/3,144/2.

<sup>73</sup> Sir Alexander Maxwell Memo (19 September 1939), TNA, HO 186/2082.

<sup>74</sup> George Graham to A. C. Sheldrake (3 August 1942), TNA, HO 186/2082.

<sup>75</sup> Draft Circular to Chief Constables, undated [August 1942], HO 186/2082; *Edinburgh Evening News* (5 August 1942).

<sup>76</sup> Minutes of Scottish FA Emergency Committee, (22 July 1942), (3 March 1943), (7 April 1943), SFM, ACC9017/39.

<sup>77</sup> Scottish FA, Annual Report, 1942-43, SFM, ACC9017/39.

England-Scotland international matches were particularly fruitful sites for the articulation of national sentiment. They had become the showpiece of the football season between the wars, especially in Scotland, acquiring particular symbolic meaning for a smaller and less powerful nation that regularly punched above its weight on the pitch. These matches were more frequent in wartime but the Scots became less successful. Of the fifteen fixtures organised between December 1939 and April 1945, Scotland won only two and drew two, scoring 20 goals against England's 53. England's 8-0 'massacre' of Scotland in Manchester in October 1943, in particular, was considered by the Scottish press a 'blow to our pride in the prowess of our footballers.'<sup>78</sup> There was even reportedly 'a strong feeling' in Scotland that the next encounter at Wembley should be cancelled due to the weakness of the Scottish eleven.<sup>79</sup> Apologists in Scotland bemoaned the fact that the existence of fewer reserved occupations and the greater number of Scots in the forces had left English football 'in a relatively much stronger position.'<sup>80</sup>

The football authorities and many football followers in Scotland were particularly suspicious of the BBC. This was partly explained by a general mistrust of sports broadcasting but also by the feeling that the London-based Corporation was not always even-handed in its treatment of football across Britain. Commentaries of international matches were a particular point of conflict. For instance, the Scottish FA responded angrily in April 1944 to the remarks of the London-based commentator, Raymond Glendenning, who they argued had exaggerated the foul play of the Scottish team and minimised that of the English during the coverage of an international at Hampden Park. He had criticised the referee for not awarding a penalty to England and, a BBC official noted, had also referred to the England team as 'we,' a common complaint that particularly irritated Scottish, Welsh and Northern Irish listeners.<sup>81</sup> A listener from Montrose outlined what he considered to be Glendenning's long-standing 'prejudice' against Scots, suggesting that he should not be allowed to return to Scotland 'as commentator of anything.'<sup>82</sup> The Outside Broadcast team consulted the FA's Stanley Rous, who thought that Glendenning had actually got it right as the referee was 'shockingly biased in favour of the home team,' though the Scottish press, perhaps not surprisingly, disagreed. The Director of Outside Broadcasting, Michael Standing, concluded that Glendenning should have been 'more restrained in his observations' and, though trivial in one sense, the Scottish BBC Programme Director agreed that it was crucial to avoid anything that

<sup>78</sup> *Daily Herald* (18 October 1943); *Falkirk Herald* (20 October 1943).

<sup>79</sup> Newspaper clipping, undated [February 1944], BBC WAC, R30/3578/1.

<sup>80</sup> Andrew Stewart to Standing (12 May 1944), BBC WAC, R30/993/1.

<sup>81</sup> Stewart to Standing (26 April 1944); Standing to Stewart (9 May 1944), BBC WAC, R30/993/1.

<sup>82</sup> J. M. Watt to BBC (25 April 1944), BBC WAC, R41/204/1.

would arouse ‘bad blood between England and Scotland’ at the present time.<sup>83</sup> However, while they considered alternative commentators, particularly Scotsmen and those who had ‘good will in Scottish football circles – where that commodity is scarce as far as we are concerned,’ they ultimately persisted with Glendenning, valuing his experience and trusting that there would be no further slips in his impartiality.<sup>84</sup>

It would be wrong to assume, however, that international representative matches meant the same things in war as they did in peace. The press and the radio constantly flagged up the abnormality of these occasions: ‘it was a strangely unfamiliar International Day in Glasgow,’ the *Glasgow Herald* noted in May 1940.<sup>85</sup> Symbols of wartime unity – allied flags, the presence of wartime leaders such as Churchill and General Montgomery, soldiers and sailors sporting the colours of both countries, and so on – existed side-by-side with the wearing of patriotic favours such as the thistle, white heather, tartan and the white rose and the continued impact of the ‘Hampden Roar,’ possibly the best known characteristic of the distinctiveness of Scottish football culture. In both Scotland and England, the press regularly spoke of such matches in terms of the continuing health of *British* football.<sup>86</sup> For the government, international representative matches powerfully represented a nation united in play, symbolised, as Glasgow’s *Sunday Post* observed in 1944, by Union Jacks flying ‘impartially’ over the ground.<sup>87</sup>

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## 5. Football Memories and War

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Most wartime studies of cultural institutions turn at some point to look at the effect of the war on the structures that governed them and the form and content of the activity itself. Plans for post-war reconstruction were often central to this, and certainly football’s governing bodies spent considerable time and energy discussing plans for transforming the game in areas such as coaching, international relations and youth football.<sup>88</sup> However, while there is no denying the importance of such plans, it is contended here that too much looking forward to ‘post-war’ among scholars has led them to neglect continuities with the pre-war period, characterised most powerfully by the wartime focus on memories and reminiscences (Baker 1999, 135-40; Holt and Mason 2000, 19-35).

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<sup>83</sup> Standing to Stewart (9 May 1944); Stewart to Standing (12 May 1944), BBC WAC, R30/993/1.

<sup>84</sup> Stewart to Standing (17 March 1942); Standing to Stewart (23 September 1944), BBC WAC, R30/993/1.

<sup>85</sup> *Glasgow Herald* (13 May 1940).

<sup>86</sup> See *Glasgow Herald* (19 January 1942).

<sup>87</sup> *Sunday Post* (Glasgow) (23 April 1944).

<sup>88</sup> See Post-War Development – An Interim Report (October 1944), FAA.

Like certain wartime cinema audiences, many football followers seem to have been most comfortable with representations of the game which dwelt on its history, and on residual elements of interwar football culture (Harper 1997, 165-6).

The emphasis on representations of football's past in the press and radio broadcasting were dictated in many respects by the practical limitations of wartime football, particularly the shortage of matches and their ad hoc organisation. Even though most national and local newspapers, for instance, devoted considerably less space to sport than they had before the war, there was proportionately even less football news, analysis and gossip to fill it with.<sup>89</sup> The tendency became particularly marked during the autumn and winter of 1940-41, when there were relatively few competitive matches, and the national Sunday press, in particular, began to print various columns on reminiscences of major sporting events.<sup>90</sup> The local press followed suit. The *Burnley Express* 'Down Memory Lane' series, for instance, included the occasional football subject.<sup>91</sup> Memories of former players, officials and teams featured heavily in the columns of a number of sports journalists, sometimes starting a dialogue with readers through the letters page. 'Sportsman's' lengthy recollections, across four columns, on games of the past disrupted by severe weather in the *Burnley Express* in January 1940, for example, received a response from 'Old Timer.' 'What a grand antidote,' he/ she wrote, 'to the blackout and all the horrors and anxieties of this war business just to sit by the fire and for a few precious moments recall the glories that were ours in the good old days.'<sup>92</sup> A similar response to a radio talk by the football referee J. A. Wiltshire came from a listener in the navy: 'It came as a change to hear someone referring to memories of happier times instead of the usual war talk bunk we get seven days a week.' He urged the BBC to broadcast more such talks as they would 'go a very long way to relieving the monotony of our various jobs.'<sup>93</sup>

Reactions of this type led the BBC to develop a number of series 'of retrospective sports features,' which became a characteristic of wartime sports broadcasting.<sup>94</sup> The first of these, *The Crowd Roared*, a series of 15-minute programmes based on events over the previous decade (the 4 April 1941 programme was titled 'Soccer Cup Finals, 1936/9'), started in early March 1941.<sup>95</sup> It drew good listening figures, at around 8.0 per cent to 11.1 per cent for its Friday, 6.30-6.45pm slot, in its first month (the 'Cup Finals' programme attracted 10.0 per cent). This was a higher percentage than listened to the vast

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<sup>89</sup> File Report 13, M-O A, 19-21.

<sup>90</sup> Standing to DPP (27 December 1940); A. P. Lee to LRD (Bristol) (8 January 1941), BBC WAC, R30/3,144/1.

<sup>91</sup> *Burnley Express* (3 January 1942).

<sup>92</sup> *Burnley Express* (31 January 1940), (3 February 1940).

<sup>93</sup> A. P. Lee to LRD (Bristol) (8 January 1941), BBC WAC, R30/3,144/1.

<sup>94</sup> Standing to DPP (27 December 1940), BBC WAC, R30/3,144/1.

<sup>95</sup> Standing to Regional Programme Directors (30 January 1941), BBC WAC, R30/3,144/1.



majority of match commentaries.<sup>96</sup> The two longest-running series were *Giants of Sport* (September 1941-July 1943) and *Sportsmen's Corner* (July 1943-May 1945). The latter was intended to link 'topical and reminiscent items of national interest' and to 'bring to the microphone' sports stars to give 'their personal experiences, both past and present.'<sup>97</sup> This could prove troublesome, as occurred in November 1943 when a programme was devoted to the former Bristol City and England defender Billy Wedlock. By then in his sixties, Wedlock had spoken well when first meeting the BBC West producer 'among his football friends,' but due to nerves he became 'almost unintelligible on the microphone' during the recording.<sup>98</sup> Other contributors, however, such as the Arsenal manager and commentator George Allison, were already well known radio personalities, and the presenters, particularly Glendenning, Leo Hunter and Victor Smythe, ensured that there was a familiar continuity between the BBC's treatment of wartime football and its ruminations on the pre-war game.

By the summer of 1944, *Sportsmen's Corner* had become dominated by narrower topics, such as talks on the history of famous clubs. A request was put out for programme ideas in early 1945 but these, too, tended to reflect local or regional interests rather than national perspectives.<sup>99</sup> BBC Scotland and BBC North complained about the poor representation of their regions ('75% London area interest' according to North Region), but Standing replied that most of the London-based programmes were actually 'of a national character.'<sup>100</sup> By May 1945, however, Standing had recognised that the material was running dry and that, more importantly, the time had come 'to give our full attention to current rather than past sporting events.'<sup>101</sup> Remembering the past as a strategy for getting through the present was no longer essential with victory and the end of the war imminent.

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## 6. Conclusion

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Selina Todd has recently argued for the Second World War to be seen as a key turning point in British class relations. While working people came to see themselves as 'a collective force' bound together by new shared experiences and needs, the government and the media portrayed them for the first time as

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<sup>96</sup> Audience Research, Listening Barometers (January-June 1941), BBC WAC, R9/11/4.

<sup>97</sup> Glendenning to West Regional Programme Director (18 August 1943), BBC WAC, R30/3,154/1.

<sup>98</sup> Hamilton Kennedy to Standing (5 November 1943); Standing to Kennedy (3 November 1943), BBC WAC, R30/3,154/1.

<sup>99</sup> *Sportsmen's Corner*, Overseas Requests, undated [March 1945], BBC WAC, R30/3,154/1.

<sup>100</sup> Victor Smythe to Geoffrey Peck (26 March 1945); Standing to Smythe (29 March 1945), BBC WAC, R30/3,154/1.

<sup>101</sup> Director of Outside Broadcasting to GOSO (3 May 1945), BBC WAC, R30/3,154/1.

‘the backbone of the nation,’ a group whose interests were now ‘synonymous with those of the country.’ This did not mean, of course, that Britain became a classless society or that there was any genuine attempt to ensure equality of sacrifice. Rather, as Todd and other scholars have persuasively argued, class and nation emerged as complementary rather than contradictory categories (Todd 2014, 120-1). As Field has noted, ‘discourses about class imply claims about its place in the nation’; both are, he suggests, ‘interdependent and reciprocally constructed’ (Field 2011, 377). Already a sport of the working class but increasingly portrayed in war as belonging to the nation too, football was one cultural form which exemplified the complex, and sometimes incongruous, impulses inherent within the project of the ‘people’s war.’ The story of what happened to the game during the conflict, and the discourses that surrounded it, offer new angles from which to view the multiple dimensions of the British wartime nation.

That histories of wartime Britain have had little to say about football is in certain respects unsurprising. Always regarded as a marginal, if not trivial, topic by the more conservative-minded scholar, football could appear to have been of even less significance between 1939 and 1945. In the abnormal circumstances of war, football was forced to adapt if it wanted to continue. It modified and revised its structures, and in some cases gave up its facilities to the military and Civil Defence authorities. National leagues and cups became regional, crowd size was restricted and the press were urged to avoiding building up interest in forthcoming fixtures. Football was still played, watched and written about. But many observers thought that much of what attracted supporters and followers to the game, its essence and its character, as well as its weekly and seasonal routine and rhythm, had been lost under wartime conditions. The temptation has therefore been to analyse football, and other sports, only in terms of what was lost, as a ‘casualty’ of the war (Field 2011, 223). This is a mistake, however, because it fails to recognise that continuities did remain, that new routines and rhythms could be established as the war proceeded, and, above all, that football could be powerfully represented by the media, and imagined by the population, even when games were less frequent and may have seemed less important. If wartime football was more low-key than in peacetime that does not mean that it was without significance and meaning for those who played and watched. To continue, to carry on, could be interpreted as a significant act, demonstrating commitment to one’s team, perhaps, but also loyalty to one’s class, locality or nation, depending on the situation and the context.

Like many other aspects of wartime life, football was more closely connected to the state than it had been before. From the beginning of the war, morale was a watchword of political and popular discussion. It was an issue that the government took extremely seriously and for which they planned meticulously. Ensuring a positive outlook on the home front was a priority as it was felt that low morale could affect war production and, in a worst case scenario, necessitate the bringing in of troops to subdue a population wracked by fear, panic and

lawlessness. Maintaining and monitoring morale became primary aims of a number of government departments and agencies. And once it was agreed that entertainment and sport were vital to help workers recuperate and to relieve boredom, it was always likely that football, widely and accurately considered the most popular sport among war workers, would be brought into the government fold. Football's importance as a provider of morale connected Stanley Rous and other important administrators tightly with policy makers and officials in Whitehall. Fixture lists were scrutinised each year, and match attendances monitored regularly to ensure crowds were high enough to guarantee a reasonable spectacle but not so high as to represent a safety risk or to signal a return to sporting normality. As we have seen, the war turned football into a political issue, and into a matter of national significance. Politicians defended it as a recreation of the ordinary worker, as they had before, but in wartime they also celebrated its value as a national game, helping to sustain a population under strain and stress.

The relationship between ideas of nation, region and class in football tell us much about what has recently been termed the 'negotiation' of identities in wartime Britain (Ugolini and Pattinson 2015). Football was remarkably malleable in the way it could illuminate different attachments and loyalties. To paraphrase Eric Hobsbawm, the 'eleven named people' in wartime football teams could embody various 'imagined communities,' often at the same time (Hobsbawm 1990, 143). Regional leagues and 'guest' players complicated the game's established geographical certainties. Clubs drifted in and out of competitions according to wider circumstances, further upsetting the reliability of long-standing allegiances between the supporter and his or her team. And the simple 'us' and 'them' of international football encounters was more likely to also simultaneously illuminate the 'we' of the British nation than before or after the war. It was perfectly possible to see representative games as occasions where national honour was at stake for the two sides and to approach the event itself as a representation of British wartime unity. Above all, we have seen that if football was acknowledged before 1939 as a people's sport, the war allowed it to be embraced more readily as a national game, albeit still one with a heavy working-class accent. Football was certainly a more important symbol of British nationhood in wartime than had previously been thought, although *its* Britain was still predominantly male, industrial and working class.

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